



Parents cautioned to feed their infants safely

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The Alabama Department of Public Health (ADPH) and the Alabama Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) have joined together to remind parents about safe feeding practices for infants and young toddlers.

Dr. Cathy Wood, a practicing pediatrician and president of the Alabama Chapter of the AAP, states, "Breastfeeding is the best choice for infants. If mothers choose not to breastfeed, commercially available formula is the other option. Solid food or other food products should be introduced into the infant's diet after 4 to 6 months on the advice of your baby's physician."

An especially important safety message for parents is to avoid giving honey to infants until after 1 year of age. Honey can contain botulism spores which reproduce in the infant's bowel. Infant botulism causes a severe, life-threatening illness including muscle weakness, with signs like poor sucking, a weak cry, constipation and poor movement.

When starting solid foods for infants and young toddlers, it is important to give foods appropriate to the age and developmental stage of the child. For example, infants just starting solids should not be given foods that require chewing.

Even as babies progress into early toddler years, it is important to remember other safe feeding advice. Chunks of food are choking hazards for young toddlers just learning to chew. Some other foods that should not be given include pieces of meat such as hot dogs and meat sticks, nuts and seeds, cubes of cheese, whole grapes, popcorn, chunks of peanut butter, raw vegetables and large pieces of apple. During infancy and early childhood, candy--including hard, sticky or gooey types--has no place in the diet.

ADPH and AAP have educational information available through brochures in the WIC program and physicians' offices concerning safe feeding for infants and young toddlers. For more information, contact your local county WIC program, your pediatrician and adph.org.